
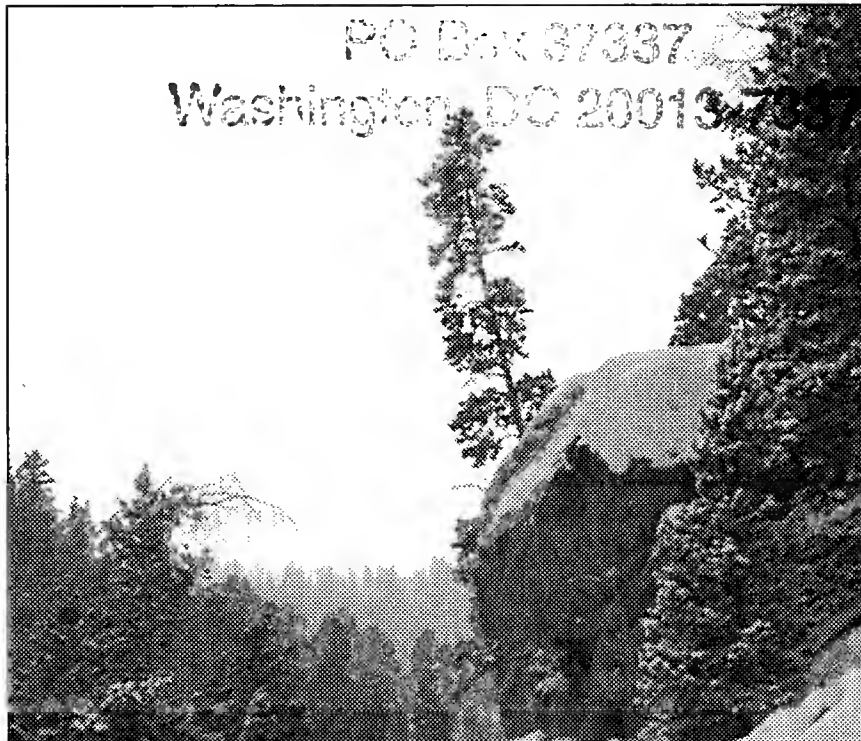


Memory Loss Among American Indians: THE CAREGIVING EXPERIENCE

A companion guide to the videotape

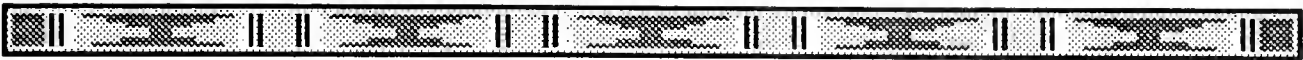

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She would go to pow wows — that was something she loved very much. ... But I remember observing her at one of the last pow wows and as the dancers would come by and shake her hand, it was this blank look in her face that she didn't really recognize who they were.

... And it made me really sad because she knew something was wrong with her. Her mind wasn't working the way that it should and she recognized that problem within herself.

— Vonda Brewster



My mother has been diagnosed with Alzheimer's. ... And I began to visualize all the things that go with this particular disease. I don't think I have the words to adequately express how terrible I felt. It was very devastating.

— Alice Lion Shows



As the circle of life continues, it's important to show respect for the elder, to care for them and to show them in all kinds of ways that you love them and that's something that is impossible to overdo. And it's all the more important to show them how much you love them when they are forgetful and confused.

— J. Neil Henderson, Ph.D.
University of S. Florida





What is Dementia?

Dementia is a name for symptoms of change in the brain. Dementia may represent confusion, memory loss and changes in behavior. The changes may be due to a brain disease, or it may be an illness of other body systems that affect the brain.

Dementia symptoms can vary. They may be progressive due to a degenerative disease, or they may stay the same, for example, due to a brain injury. Even in progressive conditions, the decline may be slow over years or rapid over a few months.

Every person with dementia deserves a thorough assessment. Dementia can be a symptom of other health problems, some of which are treatable or preventable. Your doctor can help give the correct diagnosis.





Symptoms of Alzheimer's Disease

Alzheimer's disease is a common form of dementia. It is a degenerative disease of the brain. It is not known what causes Alzheimer's disease and, currently, there is no cure. Memory loss or confusion in an elder does not automatically mean that he or she has Alzheimer's disease.

The symptoms of Alzheimer's disease are like many dementias. The changes in the brain may begin gradually. Symptoms may include:

- ▲ Forgetfulness
- ▲ Confusion
- ▲ Changes in sleep patterns
- ▲ Disorientation — becoming lost in familiar places
- ▲ Inability to do routine tasks
- ▲ Difficulty recognizing family or friends
- ▲ Personality changes or mood swings
- ▲ Suspicion or fear of others
- ▲ Difficulty communicating

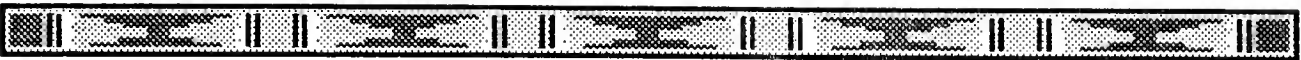


Who Can Get Alzheimer's Disease?

Improvements in health care today mean that people are living longer. While many people enjoy good health well into their later years, some elders experience memory loss and confusion.

About four million people in the United States have Alzheimer's disease. The risk of getting Alzheimer's increases with age. It usually occurs after age 65. Nearly half of the people over age 85 may have Alzheimer's. However, it is not a normal part of aging.

Alzheimer's disease is the fourth leading cause of death for adults in America. It strikes men and women of all races and can be found worldwide.



Can Memory Loss Be Treated or Cured?

Memory loss or dementia is not always a sign of Alzheimer's disease. It may be an indication of other conditions that can be treated, such as:

- ▲ nutritional deficiencies
- ▲ metabolic disorders including diabetes, lung disease and dehydration
- ▲ medications and their combinations
- ▲ drug and alcohol abuse
- ▲ blood vessel problems such as high blood pressure and heart disease
- ▲ severe depression

If a patient is diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease, the physician may be able to treat some of the symptoms, thereby easing the caregiver's job. While Alzheimer's disease cannot be cured, much can be done to help both the elder and the caregiver.



When A Loved One Has Memory Loss

Family members may observe memory loss and confusion in an elder but often think it is a normal part of aging. Since symptoms may begin gradually, it's possible that the problem goes unnoticed for a long time. An elder may not be aware that they have dementia.

It is important to schedule a medical examination with a physician as soon as problems are suspected. There is no easy test to determine if a person has Alzheimer's disease. The best diagnostic test is a careful history and physical and mental examination by a doctor with a knowledge of dementing diseases.



The Role of the Caregiver for Victims of Alzheimer's

Two-thirds of elders with Alzheimer's disease receive care in the home from family members. In the early stages of Alzheimer's, care may be in the form of supervision and companionship. As the disease progresses, caregiving can become very difficult.

Times of respite are essential for caregivers. Family members and friends can help the caregiver by listening. Guidance may be found from traditional healers. Support groups and adult day care centers may also help relieve stress.



"The caregiving job can be brutal. And the caregiver has to be sometimes helped to take care of themselves also. If they become so burned out that they can no longer provide adequate care and safety for the loved one, then you essentially have two patients in a household where before you only had one."

— J. Neil Henderson, Ph.D.
University of South Florida



Additional Resources



Area Agencies on Aging
National Eldercare Locator
1-800-677-1116

Alzheimer's Association
919 North Michigan Avenue
Suite 1000
Chicago, Illinois 60611-1676
1-800-272-3900

Alzheimer's Disease Education and Referral
(ADEAR) Center
P.O. Box 8250
Silver Springs, Maryland 20907-8250
1-800-438-4380



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